

Districts aiding local farmers on Enhancement Program

Special to The Odessa File

SCHUYLER COUNTY, Dec. 24 -- Governor Cuomo announced the release of program criteria for the \$25 million Southern Tier Agricultural Industry Enhancement Program (STAIEP) on Monday, December 14.

The eligibility requirements are now available online in the form of a fact sheet at www.schuylerswcd.com. The program will provide crucial funding for projects designed to help farms and agribusinesses expand and grow their operations, as well as increase environmental enhancements. Applications will be available beginning January 19, 2016 at your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

This innovative program will be utilized to enhance the economics of our local farming operations. The \$25 million in funding has been split between the eligible 13 counties based on the number of estimated eligible farming operations. Schuylers County has been awarded \$900,000 and Chemung County has been awarded \$500,000. These funds will be utilized on projects that range between \$20,000 and \$100,000 in size. There is a minimum of a 10% cash match for projects that range between \$20,000 thru \$50,000. There is a minimum of a 25% cash match for projects that range between \$50,001 and \$100,000. The key is that the proposed projects will have a positive economic impact on the farming operation itself and implement an approved farm business or environmental plan. This allows for many potential eligible projects. Some ineligible projects include the purchase of equipment, land, or animals.

There are several criteria that a farming operation has to meet in order to be eligible to apply for this source of funding. One of these criteria areas narrows the amount of eligible operations significantly to focus on those that earn their livelihood from their farming operation. This criteria states that for three out of the last five years the farming operation has to have received the Farmers' Property School Tax Credit. This is explained in great detail in a fact sheet from the Farm Bureau on the Schuylers County Soil and Water Conservation District's website www.schuylerswcd.com. There are many other criteria for eligibility, which are explained in great detail in the

STAIEP fact sheet also found on the Schuyler County SWCD website.

This initiative will be run through your Soil and Water Conservation Districts. All interested farming operations located in Chemung and Schuyler Counties are encouraged first to visit the Schuyler County SWCD website to see the qualifications for the program to determine if they feel their operation is eligible, and next to call Jerry Verrigni, District Manager of the Schuyler County SWCD, at (607) 229-9332.

The Schuyler County SWCD works in partnership with the Chemung County SWCD on many of their agricultural projects. The Schuyler County SWCD is trying to make a concerted effort to visit and discuss this program directly with those thought-to-be-eligible farms and has done so with most of those potentially eligible in Schuyler County, and will try to complete most of those farms in Chemung County the week of the 21st of December.